

Amendments to the Specification:

Please add the following new paragraph beginning at page 1, line 6, between the headings “BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION” and “1. Field of the Invention”:

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This Application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Ser. No. 10/101,188, filed on March 20, 2002.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 1, line 8, with the following rewritten paragraph:

The present invention relates to axle assemblies for motor vehicles and methods for assembling thereof in general, and more particularly to a ~~drive axle assembly including a support beam member having a substantially flat, central plate section, and two opposite axle shaft members rotatably supported in a spaced relationship with respect to the central plate section of the support beam member and to a method for assembling the same axle assemblies.~~